
Higher Education Committee

HB 2486

Brief Description: Addressing the implementation of inmate postsecondary education degree programs to reduce recidivism.

Sponsors: Representatives Pettigrew, Roberts, Fey, Springer, Freeman, Pollet and Santos.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Eliminates the statutory provision that prohibits the Department of Corrections (DOC) from paying for postsecondary education.
- Authorizes the DOC to implement postsecondary education degree programs within available resources.
- Provides that an inmate may be selected to participate in a state-funded postsecondary education degree program, based on priority determined by the DOC.

Hearing Date: 1/28/14

Staff: Madeleine Thompson (786-7304).

Background:

Legislation enacted in 1995 required that the Department of Corrections (DOC) prioritize resources for education. The DOC was required, to the extent possible and considering available funds, to prioritize its resources to meet the goals for incarcerated inmates. The agency had to prioritize its goals in the following order:

1. achievement of basic academic skills through obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent and achievement of vocational skills necessary for purposes of work programs and for an inmate to qualify for work upon release;
2. additional work and education programs based on assessments and placements; and
3. other work and education programs as appropriate.

In 2007 legislation was enacted that required the DOC to reprioritize its resources to meet the following goals for inmates in the following specific order:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

1. achievement of basic academic skills through obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent;
2. achievement of vocational skills necessary for purposes of work programs and for an inmate to qualify for work upon release;
3. additional work and education programs necessary for compliance with an offender's individual re-entry plan; and
4. any other appropriate vocational, work, or education programs that are not necessary for compliance with an offender's individual re-entry plan.

The DOC was explicitly prohibited from paying for postsecondary education. Any inmate expressing interest in postsecondary courses must self-pay for the costs of a postsecondary education degree program or by receiving funding from a third party.

The DOC has developed a process for offenders interested in participating in self-paid postsecondary academic, vocational, and theology programs through correspondence education involving an educational course or series of classes necessary to obtain or achieve a proficiency standard. Courses are completed through the mail with an accredited educational institution that meets all criteria necessary to gain accreditation recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, or one of the approved accrediting commissions or councils listed in the DOC's policy.

Summary of Bill:

Recognizing that there is a positive correlation between education opportunities and reduced recidivism, it is the intent of the Legislature to offer appropriate postsecondary opportunities to inmates.

The statutory provision that explicitly prohibits the DOC from paying for postsecondary education is eliminated. The DOC may implement postsecondary education degree programs within available resources.

An inmate may be selected to participate in a state-funded postsecondary education degree program, based on priority criteria determined by the DOC. An inmate not meeting the DOC's priority criteria for the state-funded postsecondary education degree program must pay the costs for participation in a postsecondary education degree program if he or she elects to participate in the program. The inmate may pay for the program through self-pay or may receive funding from a third party.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.